

Bed Bugs Fact Sheet

What are bed bugs?	<p>Bed bugs are small, wingless insects that prefer to feed on people, but will feed on other warm-blooded animals if there are no people around. They are oval in shape, but flat, and move very fast. They prefer to feed in the dark. Bed bugs might be suspected if you wake up with itchy bites you did not have when you went to sleep. The insects are most often found in places with a high rate of occupant turnover, such as hotels, motels, dormitories and apartment complexes. However, because bed bugs can hide in pillows, luggage and clothing, they can easily spread to your home. The bugs can also enter your home in used furniture, especially used mattresses, bedsprings and bed frames.</p> <p>Bed bug infestation is not a sign of poor housekeeping or hygiene. The insects are found all over the world and are constantly being spread with furniture, luggage and bedding. They had become scarce in the US after 1950. However, they are again becoming more common. There is no one reason for the increase in bed bugs. Factors that have a role include increased world travel and reduced use of pesticides.</p>
What are the symptoms?	<p>A bed bug bite is painless and bed bugs are not known to transmit disease. The bite resembles the bite of fleas or mosquitoes and causes an itchy, red welt or localized swelling that may appear up to 2 days after the bite. Some people have no reaction to the bite. Rows of three or so welts on exposed skin are characteristic signs of bed bugs. Repeated exposure to bed bug bites over several weeks may cause some people to become more sensitized to the saliva of the bugs and additional bites might lead to a greater allergic reaction.</p>
How are bites treated?	<p>Antihistamines and corticosteroids may help reduce allergic reactions. Anyone with severe allergic reactions should see their physician. Scratching the welt may lead to secondary infection, which can be more serious than the bite.</p>
How can bed bugs be controlled?	<p>Preventing bed bug spread is important. Carefully check clothing and luggage when you travel. Closely inspect any used furniture before taking it home. Eliminating bed bugs often requires several actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The infested room must be thoroughly cleaned. Surfaces should be scrubbed with a stiff brush. Use a strong vacuum on every surface, crack and crevice. Dismantle bed frames and headboards, remove drawers from desks and dressers, take down pictures and turn over all furniture to inspect and clean hiding spots, keeping in mind that upholstered furniture may not be easily cleaned or treated for the insect pest. Vacuum the mattress, being sure to get in all tufts and seams. Often, mattresses, box springs, upholstered furnishings are removed and discarded due to possible eradication failure in commercial situations. • A zippered cover, such as one used for dust mites, can be put over mattresses and box springs once the mattress, bed frame, slats and box springs are cleaned. Make sure there are no holes or tears in the cover. Leave the cover on for at least a year as a bed bug can live months without feeding. Pull the bed away from the wall and keep all bedding from touching the floor. • Motels and hotels almost always use a pest control company to eradicate bed bugs. In homes with severe infestations, a pest control professional may also be needed to eradicate bed bugs. If you decide to treat the infestation with a pesticide yourself, be sure to use only a household insecticide that is labeled “<u>for bed bug control</u>” and follow the manufacturers direction closely. Do not use any insecticide on a mattress unless the label specifically states that it can be applied to mattresses and how to apply. • If you dispose of anything that has been infested, make sure it is taken to a landfill. Do not allow it to be reused and continue the spread of bed bugs.

For more information about bed bugs, visit: www.hsph.harvard.edu/bedbugs